

# ***VA Honors Minneapolis Officer***

When Minneapolis VAMC Police Officer Robert “Tim” Pawelski got the call at home from Police Chief Rick Encinas, he guessed he was in trouble. “I thought, did I leave my gun somewhere?” How often does your boss call you at home with good news?” Indeed, it was very good news! Officer Pawelski had been selected as VA’s national “Patrol Officer of the Year” and he would be heading to Tampa, FL, to accept the honor. “Needless to say, I was surprised and humbled,” said Pawelski, who joined the Minneapolis VAMC police force in 2008 following retirement from the U.S. Department of Energy in 2004 and a short stint at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery. He also served as a Federal Police Officer at the Federal Reserve in Minneapolis and was a Military Police Officer in the U.S. Army for three years.

Officer Pawelski primarily works the overnight, 11 p.m. – 7 a.m. shift. He says, “the job is still new and I have a lot to learn.” He credits Sgt. Munson and Sgt. Luedtke as mentors. However, his 25 years of experience in law enforcement has adapted well to the VA. He talks of using the “soft hand” approach whenever possible, employing the “hard hand” only when absolutely necessary.

During the night shift, Officer Pawelski uses what he calls the PPR style of “Protection, Prevention and Response.” When time permits, he makes the rounds of all the nursing units. While checking on all active wards, he checks to make sure internal doors are locked and secure. He patrols the parking lots during the night shift changes and at times escorts staff to their cars in the darkened parking lot. He patrols the VAMC facility as well as Fort Snelling Cemetery and other VA-owned buildings, the Fisher House and HiWay Credit Union.

At any time, Officer Pawelski and others on duty at night must be prepared to respond to an emergency or security threat. That may occur on a clinical ward with a confused patient wanting to leave, or a new arrival in the Emergency Department. “My first approach is always to try and talk them down,” said Officer Pawelski, who is one of five VAMC officers who has completed Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) and has a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Being a veteran often helps. “I will tell patients that I served, too, and that will sometimes help us get a conversation going,” said Officer Pawelski. “It’s a brotherhood thing.”

A native of Mobridge, South Dakota, Officer Pawelski and his wife Lori have four grown children including a son and daughter-in-law who have both served in Iraq. “I come from a military family,” he says.

What has been his most unusual experience working the night shift? It occurred shortly before dawn at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery when Officer Pawelski indentified an individual roaming the grounds. He expected to find a poacher; the cemetery often draws deer from the river valley. “The hairs on the back of my head stood up as I approached him,” Officer Pawelski said. But the man did not have a gun; he had a camera. “The guy said he really loved taking pictures of white-tailed deer,” Officer Pawelski said. “I explained that out of respect for the

families of veterans, maybe he should take his pictures someplace else.” The “soft hand” approach worked and the roaming cameraman departed.

Chief Encinas said Officer Pawelski has been an incredible asset to this department. “Tim has shown that he is truly dedicated to serving our veterans. Even as a new officer to the VA Police, he mentored new and younger officers who work with him.” In the nomination to VACO, Officer Pawelski was described as a “firm but caring officer and comments from the staff, patients and visitors bear this out. Officer Pawelski routinely takes active and extra steps to assist the patients, visitors and staff through the crisis periods. He uses life experience with police skills to gain voluntary compliance and de-escalation of situations.”